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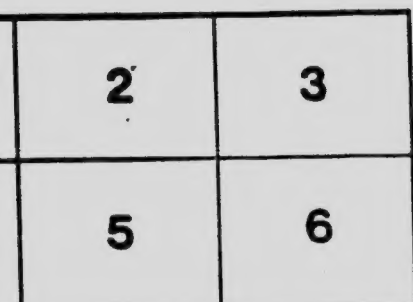
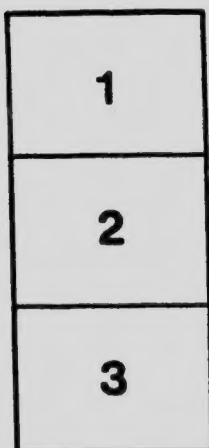
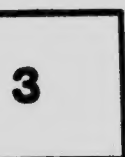
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J. H. JURRES

An
Appreciation

By
E. F. B. JOHNSTON, K. C.



A. J. Milnes

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Toronto

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J. H. MILNES

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AN APPRECIATION

BY

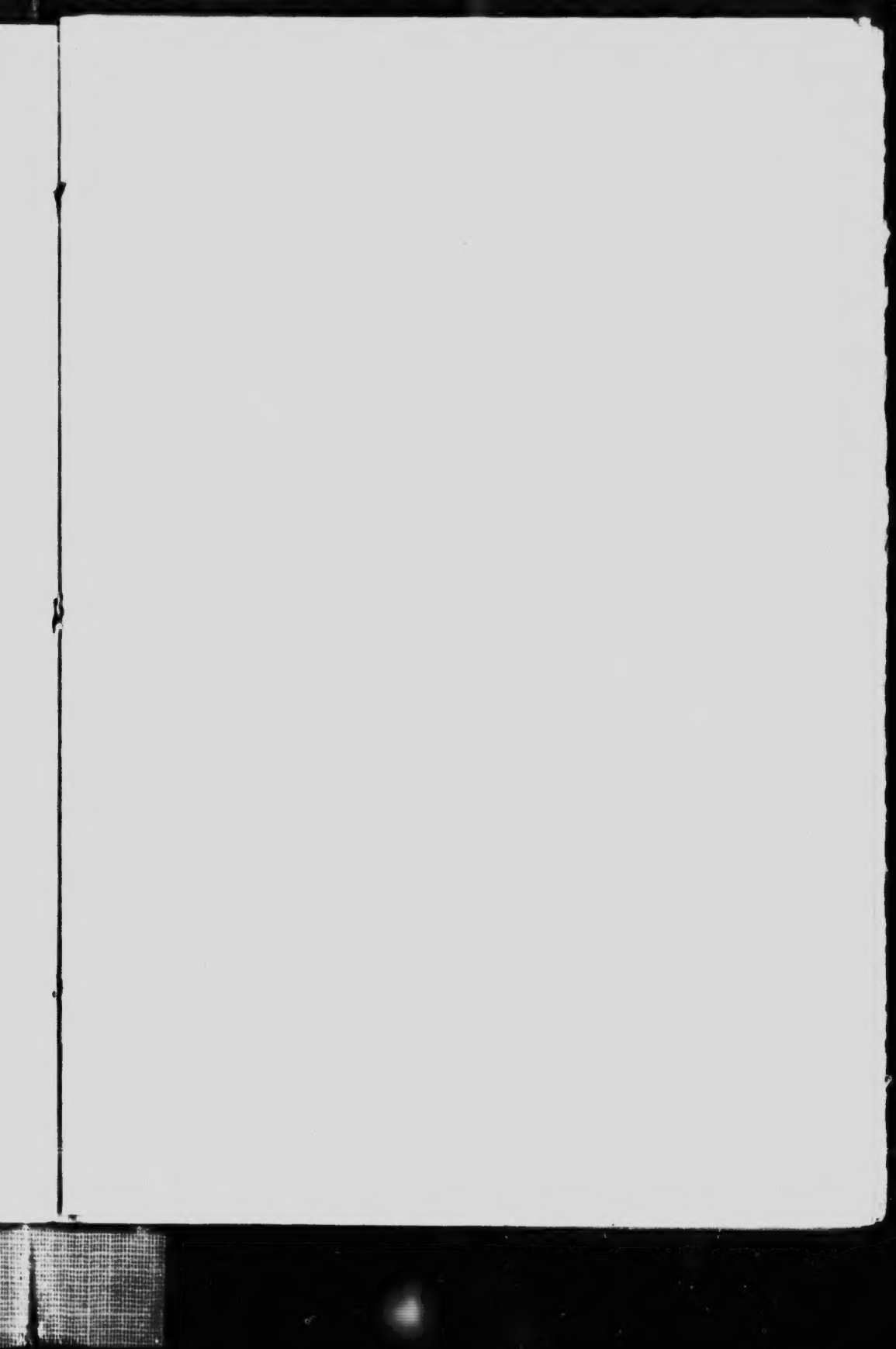
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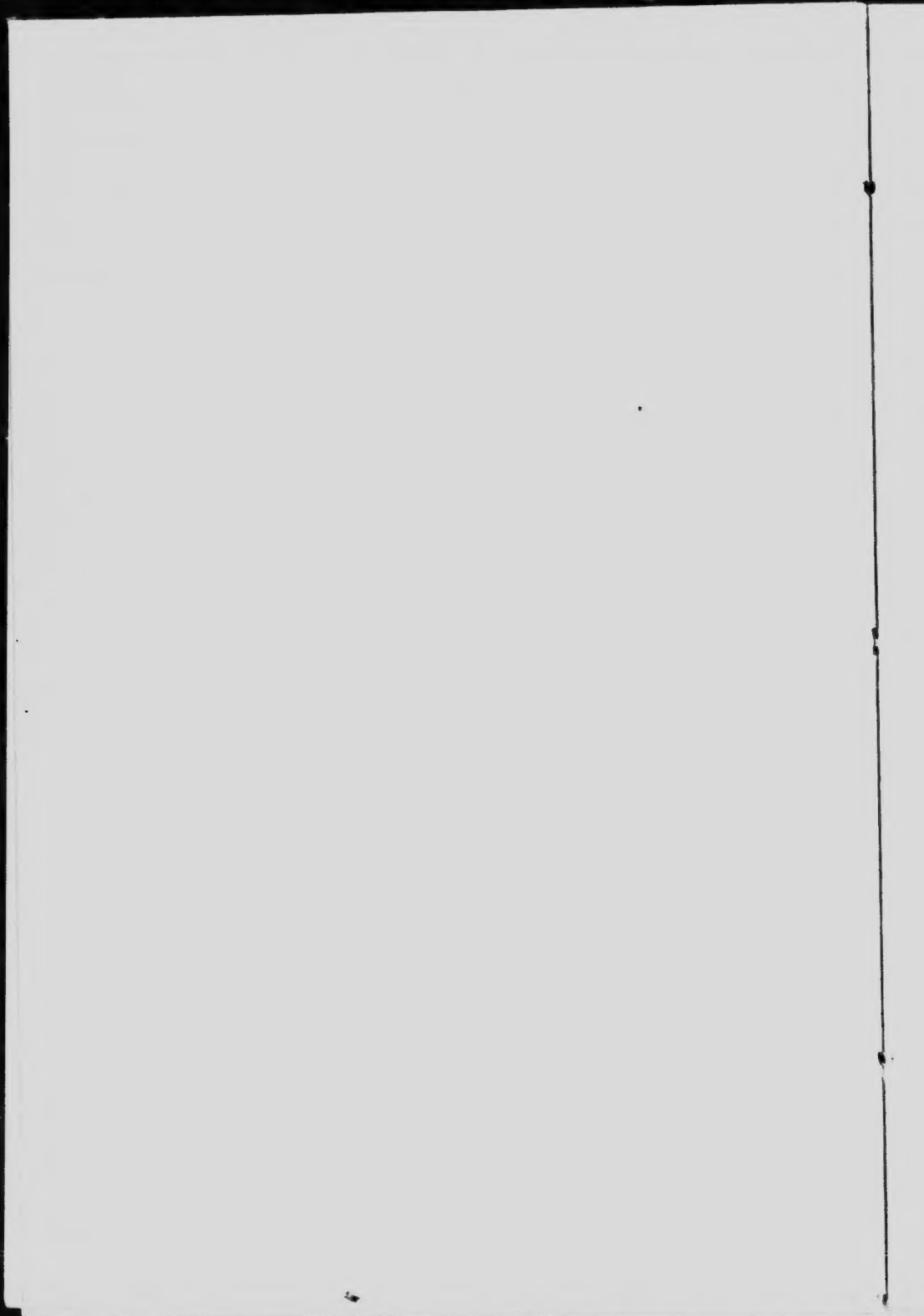
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Introductory and Personal.

TWENTY-FIVE years ago, and before modern Dutch art was recognized at all in Canada, and very little known in America, I was greatly impressed by some water colors by Wm. Maris, Anton Mauve, Weissenbruch, and others, which came to my notice through the late Mr. Scott, of Montreal. A few of them remained with me as the beginning of a modest collection. It appeared to me that these pictures marked a new era in art, of which great results might be expected. Year after year, this small personal beginning was supplemented. The collection was confined almost exclusively to the works of those who are now the modern Dutch masters. Within a few years past, J. H. Jurrès was added as worthy of great consideration. Frequently seeing his paintings in Holland, and possessing some of his best examples, there has been ample opportunity to judge of the quality and value of his work. It is, therefore, a pleasure to write a note on the work of Jurrès from the standpoint of a layman and a collector, and avoiding technical matters as much as possible, I shall endeavor to give the impressions resulting from some years of companionship with his pictures.



Historical.

LESS than a century ago, the painters of Holland had fallen far below the standard of real art. There were the great master-spirits of painting to look back to—Rembrandt (1606-1669), Franz Hals (1584-1666), Aelbert Cuyp (1620-1691), Jacob van Ruisdael (1628-1682), with others, forming a wonderful group in the 17th century. Subsequent to this period, the nation, from an art point of view, contented itself with a retrospective record of what her artists had done in the past. It appeared as if the book of Dutch art had come to an end, and that there were none to continue the pictorial record created by perhaps the most wonderful painters the world has ever seen.

The old Dutch masters had kept the standard at the highest point in their delineation of the individualism of Dutch character, but their art was not thereby local. They expressed themselves in terms of universal application. The work continued for about one hundred years to devolve upon the men referred to, each one filling an important place in the current history of art, until the record ended with the 17th century in the person of Willem van de Velde, who died in 1707. From that time down to the day of William Roeloffs (1822-1897), and during the whole of the 18th century, the genius of painting lay dormant. Art degenerated to the level of historic representation and mere formalism. In England, Constable and Turner appeared and

impressed the world with the power of their conception and execution. The Classic and the Romanticist schools had failed to keep alive any great interest in art, and the appearance of these two great men demonstrated that pictures are more than mere color or arrangement. Following on this state of affairs in England, and almost contemporaneous with it, there came into existence a small body of men in France, known as the Barbizon School, who forsook the academic and conventional theories, and apparently resolved to investigate for themselves what nature and humanity contained in store for those who had the courage, in their own way, to explore beneath the outward expression of a landscape or the external semblance of the spirit within. The form and face of the man or woman were no longer the object of their search. They began by looking for the inner sympathies and secret passions of mankind as evidenced in the individual, and whether it was the burden of labor or the sentiment of domestic happiness, the toil-worn peasants at work, or nymphs at play, an earnest effort was made to get at the mainspring of the conditions they saw around them. What was the secret contained in the woods full of gloom or rich with glowing color? Why did the sunlight on the meadows or streams kindle a sympathetic fire in the peasant at work as well as in the man of leisure? What was there in the gray days that carried the mental sympathies back to many well-nigh forgotten incidents, or what in the beautiful forest made the old men young again, and the children happy and forgetful of their infantile troubles? "There must be a key to unlock this secret chest, so full of beautiful things," they said

to themselves, and to each other. And thereupon each one, after his own particular fashion, searched for and found the key, with the result that we have a Millet and a Diaz, a Corot and a Rousseau.

But all these great men, to whom I have referred, were, strictly speaking, interpreters, not creators. Their subjects were before and all around them. They had but to look, and, with the power to unlock the mystic chambers of the unknown, they were able to see and comprehend, and by their genius were able to translate and interpret to their fellow-men, the language of nature. They read the handwriting of the Creator in His works and portrayed to us its cunning and wonderful power. The beauty which we had never seen, became apparent. The material elements were only the media through which the eye saw and the mind appreciated the inherent beauties of nature and the sentiments and passions of human life. These painters in one sense were creators, but essentially they were interpreters. This distinction will aid in conveying the idea which will be dealt with later on.

Before these men disappeared, leaving a great blank in the realm of art, the spirit of the old Dutch masters was revived in Holland by new men, and the forerunner of another remarkable group quietly but surely made himself felt. William Roeloffs felt as the great French and English painters did, and pursuing his lonely way amongst the commonplaces of his day in Holland, worked out the problem of how to express in simple language the truth and explain the mystery of nature. He began by simplicity. He increased the force of his message by color. He brought his fellow-men into very close companionship with many subtle and beautiful

ideas. Immediately, and almost contemporaneously, came Bosboom, Israels, Weissenbruch, the Maris brothers and Mauve, some of them more or less influenced by the Barbizon masters. But their art existed and was developed without any aid from any school. Some of these painters had, in the lifetime of the Barbizon men, painted magnificent pictures. They would have been as great artists as they are considered now, without the existence of Millet or Diaz. The influence which chiefly affected them was their own genius, directed by the examples of the older masters of their own country, and incidentally by this means opened the eyes of art lovers to the great beauty and power of Rembrandt and Frans Hals. Space does not permit of any review of the great part these men have taken in the history of modern art. Their power is not confined to Holland. It has spread over Great Britain and the continent of Europe and influenced thousands of art lovers in America. Their works have become national treasures in almost every gallery in Europe. No private collection can be considered complete without some examples of their work. The host of imitators and followers in their own country has only accentuated their individual greatness. The record of these modern masters is a marvel. Their productions exercise a tremendous force wherever art is known. There will perhaps never be such a body of artists in any one country at one period again. The future will extend and add to their convincing power, and when the world's history of art is finished, they will occupy a unique position on the record. Again, let it be said, that all these artists are more or less interpreters. They have the poem of nature or the book of life before them,

and as they read aright, so do they convince and delight their vast audiences. But they are not "creators" in the strict sense of the word. They are discoverers of things hidden from the ordinary observer. Their power is derived from the fact that they are able to unfold the mysteries of nature and give a stamp of reality to the moods and feelings of humanity. They seize upon a situation already in existence, and by the force of genius, clothe that situation in such a wonderful manner that we are enabled to see and feel as they do, and the scene becomes a living thing by the cunning hand of the master, obeying his will, and expressing his sentiment, thought and idea. It is by this analysis, and by the interpretation of the artist, that we not only see the things unknown to us or unnoticed, but feel that we too are placed in sympathetic relation to the subject-matter of the picture.

Let there be no misunderstanding as to what is meant by the word "creator," as applied to painting. In one sense, Israels is a great "creator," but the basis of his work is an existing fact, which he seizes upon, and by his marvellous genius, conveys to us its many phases and characteristics. He makes the situation apparent to us in a new and intelligent manner. To the physical fact he adds the spiritual and the human passion, and gives to the material subject its peculiar psychological attributes. For instance, he paints the mother and child in the homely and simple interior. The child is a type of the ordinary child, as the mother is of the common peasant class. The surroundings are common, existing circumstances. He does not create these facts. But he breathes into this combination of simple material elements of life, the feeling of maternity, the spiritual

thoughts of domestic contentment and devotion, and inspires the humble subject with pathos and poetry, so that we stand before his picture and say, "What manner of man is he who can do all this?" Even the sunlight and the air come through the window with a nervous, palpitating vibration. There is not seen in many pictures by other artists such ethereal atmosphere, such wonderful power of delineating and expressing the intangible and the spiritual. His brush is a wand of magic and his power that of the magician. But he has not created the occasion or the situation involving the fundamental elements of his picture. He had these before him, as we all have had during a lifetime. He has, however, created the soul that gives them life in art, and it is this which makes his best works immortal.

Having stated briefly and in a general way, an important distinction to be borne in mind, we come to the immediate subject.

J. H. Jurres—General Estimate.

The one man in Holland to-day who is a great "creator" in art is J. H. Jurres. I do not mean to assert that he is as yet the equal by comparison of the men already referred to in technique, in sentiment or in subtlety of expression. His maturity is not yet in sight. His power has not been fully realized or revealed. He has, however, given the strongest kind of evidence that he possesses a reserve force which time will make manifest and experience render available. His methods are not those of the modern Dutch masters, and his manner of expressing his individual thoughts on art is not that of a Mauve or a Maris. No comparison can be

made between him and his illustrious countrymen. In modern art, Jurre stands alone and unique.

Just at the time when the great men of the nineteenth century, save one or two, had passed away, and when the survivors had practically finished the record of their studios, leaving behind them a numerous host of artists who have yet their record to make, there arose a man, young in years and immature in art, whose productions savored more of the glory of the old masters than of anything in the modern history of painting. He looked not to the material objects around him for subjects, but wandered into the fields of imagination, seeking more for a medium for the expression of his ideas of the beautiful than for concrete subjects worthy of painting. The meadows and canals, the quaint old houses and the picturesque mills, the gray days and the golden sunsets of his country did not quicken his pulse or stir his enthusiasm to action. Dreaming of beautiful pictures in which light and shadow, brilliant color and marvellous action of man and horse dominated every other feeling, he turned to the classics of Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra and Le Sage for the inspiration necessary to direct and control the hand and eye of the artist within him. Don Quixote became to him a real, living being. Gil Blas awakened his sense of color and adventure, and kindled the fire that smouldered waiting for the blast of genius to ignite it into flame. He sought also to explore the boundless shores of human passion through the light of the Divine examples in the Book of Books. Taking these sources of inspiration, he created the moving spirits, the scene, the composition, and the environment of his subjects, and there appeared from time to time

the glowing embodiment of his mental and spiritual dreams, and the living image of the visions he had seen and known so well. Other artists, at various times, had worked out for themselves a course somewhat similar in its character, but totally different in its execution. They looked for themes which were subjects for the imagination of the poets of ancient Greece and Rome. The young Dutch artist sought for incidents amidst the humorous exploits of the gentleman of La Mancha and the varied adventures of the youth of Santillane. As Shakespeare created the characters of Hamlet and Othello, so did this young and unknown painter begin to create on canvas the scenes of humorous escapade and lawless adventure, and occasionally depicted the incidents recorded in the world's greatest Book, representing the mainsprings of human feeling and the power of spiritual regeneration.

Such is Jurres—a poet in color, an exponent of the imagination, a creator of character, a painter of movement and action. In art, he works in a field already rich with the harvest of his labors, apart from his fellows, and differing entirely from their methods and manner of expression. Most of the men working earnestly in Holland to-day are influenced more or less by the modern masters. Many of the artists are merely imitators. What the future may bring to any of these men is not certain. Some of them may become the peers of Israels or Jacob Maris. A few are showing individual force and character of expression, but Jurres in his work has no master to follow, no example to imitate.

Knowing the artist personally, one is struck with the earnestness of his nature and keenness of his intellect,

the effect of which is so manifest in his pictures. He is not satisfied with doing a thing well. He must do it better, and it is only after numerous studies and sketches in both pencil and color that he assembles the parts together in one creation. I saw in his studio a few years ago, more than half a dozen studies of the head of Rebecca, worked out with intellectual discernment and great sincerity. He had evidently struggled with many difficulties before he arrived at the perfect head for the full figure as part of a large canvas. Drawings of bandits and robbers are to be found in his rooms in all stages looking towards completion, many of them being elaborate pencil sketches, and all showing fine appreciation of line and careful study of vitality. Every now and then, one comes across a figure which forms an important factor in some scene from the subject or book from which inspiration is drawn. The pictures of armed men and saddled horses are not therefore the outcome of mere momentary impressions, nor are they the ordinary illustrations accompanying the text of some favorite author. They are bold, original conceptions, the result of thought, sympathy and intelligence. Many weeks, perhaps months, have been occupied in their development. Every detail has been thought out so that the ultimate result shall be perfect. They are as original and imaginative as the groups of angels by Raphael or Titian. Everything in them breathes of art and feeling. Color dominates, but it is the color of an artist who speaks to us through that medium as if it were a language, clear and intelligible. These pictures may tell their own story, but they do much more. They grasp the combination of circumstances brought about by the author and impart a

meaning which cannot be conveyed by words alone. The scene becomes a living drama in which the actors take their respective parts. There is life in every movement. Whether it be the alert rider on the jaded horse looking for the approach of the suspecting traveller or laying plans to circumvent the enemy, we are at once impressed with the vivid and realistic vision before us, and feel that danger is pending and the onslaught not far off. And yet there is an entire absence of realism in the work. The power to make this impression of actuality is the power of great imaginative faculties. It is the work of a creator, of a man who takes from the innermost recesses of his mind, materials for his work, and so moulds and shapes and clothes them as to make them sentient, living beings. This is genius, the same genius that makes Josef Israels the greatest psychological painter of modern times.

In dealing with the work of Jurres in a somewhat critical way, there are a few matters worthy of separate consideration. As a whole, every picture may be truthfully said to be a creation. The landscape forms part of the general scheme, and it is very noticeable that the form which the different accessory landscapes respectively take is the form which belongs most appropriately and sympathetically to the subject in which it is used. The men and horses, singly or in groups, act their respective parts like the characters in a perfectly constructed drama. No one acts independently, but all are parts of a harmonious whole. The absence of any one part would mar the conception expressed in the picture, and the addition of other objects would destroy the balance so admirably ad-

justed by the artist. But there are individual matters to be dealt with in arriving at the true estimate of the productions of a man, whom I look upon as the greatest of all the younger artists of the day.

Color.

First, there is the question of color to be considered. Several of the pictures painted by Jurres are too dark to be capable of full appreciation, but even these are wonderfully illuminated by broad and magnificent notes of color. I have on more than one occasion urged upon Mr. Jurres the advisability of working out his ideas in a lighter key. Whether it is due to this suggestion, or to the fact that, as he gains by experience, he sees more light in the expression of his thoughts, he certainly paints to-day with greater brilliancy and a keener sense of air and light than he did a few years ago. The danger of using dark pigments is too well known to be discussed. Time, instead of improving, tends to increase the defect, and after a century or so, the picture becomes obscure and often unintelligible. There is, however, in all the works of Jurres, a great deal of magnificent color, so much so that he is often called the second Rembrandt of Holland. With proper and sufficient lighting, his dark pictures are marvelously strong and effective. There is a quality of richness and depth in his color that fascinates and compels attention. The browns of the earth, the strong greens of the trees and the splendid reds and blues of his figures are in themselves the finest art, and when there is added to this combination, a perfect sense of harmonies and relative values, it is no wonder that the

best judges of art stand convinced of the genius of the painter. His use of color is very direct. I would not say of his color that it is subtle in its character. Sometimes he appeals to the eye by means of delicious and subdued browns and a peculiar gray which is seldom seen in the work of any other painter. Whatever choice he makes of a color scheme, it is always noticeable that his methods are very direct, and yet no one color dominates another. The picture as a whole dominates the observer with its strength and sense of color, but it would be difficult to say that this result is produced by the influence of any one color on the canvas. The white horse is as impressive as the red cloak of its rider, and the deep green of the foliage is as brilliant in effect as the warm brown earth of the road beneath it. In this respect, Jurrès is undoubtedly a master, and whilst one would not be justified in putting him on the same plane with Rembrandt, he has much of the great master's feeling for that which makes a picture "a thing of beauty and a joy forever."

Drawing.

There are and have been noted painters whose defects in drawing have marred many otherwise fine pictures. It is often the case that the painters of landscape trust to color and arrangement to hide defective drawing. Their trees are more or less shapeless objects, without the redeeming quality of broad masses of color. But on the other hand, there are great men who prefer to give the general character of trees and other objects by the massing of color, preserving only the outline necessary to indicate form and feature.

Of such was Weissenbruch. This master often attained the objective point of his picture by wonderful blocking out of trees and clouds, leaving them without further detail, although there is more often found the most exquisite fulness of detail in form, depth and disposition. The drawing of Jurre's is quite remarkable, and however broadly he may paint, his details are never wanting. Everything is studied most carefully. The execution of his work is characterized by the utmost care and attention to drawing. It may be that the figure is apparently put in with great breadth of treatment and brush freedom, but the form is perfect, the line is exact, the anatomy minutely depicted. Like Willem Maris in painting cows in a meadow, the structure of the animal is never lost sight of, and light and shadow are always in true relation to each other, and to the anatomical outline of the figure. Whilst I am a great admirer of the skill and genius of Willem Maris in painting landscapes with the sunlight on his cattle, I admit most readily that, in some respects, the horses of Jurre's are drawn with greater firmness and sometimes more strongly delineated than are the cows with which the greater artist has made us so familiar. There is no doubt that when Jurre's reaches the age and has the experience of his elder confrere, he will be justly considered as his equal, and it is indeed surprising that a man of only thirty-five years of age is entitled to be named in comparison with an artist of the power and reputation which Maris may justly claim as his right. Many of the pencil drawings of Jurre's show with what certainty and freedom he works. The mind is clear as to its conception of subject. The eye already sees it on paper. The hand appears almost

involuntarily to be guided by instinct to give effect to the vision, and with rapidity and sureness the object appears in tangible form, betraying no hesitation or uncertain halting in its lines. The same result is found in his color. His brush is not needed to cover defects in line or form. Rather it is used in accentuating the correctness of the drawing and emphasizing the line which tells so much.

Action.

The modern English artist, with some notable exceptions, seems content with pleasing compositions and conventional figures. A party of beautiful women and well-groomed men, or an idyllic garden situation with unruffled serenity pervading alike the figures and the landscape, appeals to a large section of the English public, and there are unfortunately too many artists whose ability is limited to the pleasing task of supplying the demand. Listless and lacking in physical vigor, these types of humanity are portrayed as merely decorative incidents in a still more decorative landscape. The figures of Sargeant and Lavery, the animals of Swan and the masses in color by Brangwyn are the very essence of vitality, but a glance at the walls of Burlington House on the occasion of an Academy Exhibition, convinces one of the unimpressive condition of English art at the present time. To see how different it is with the Dutch artists one has only to look at Jurres as an illustration. In the work of Jurres there is no formalism. Every part of his picture is vigorous, full of animation and movement. Whether it is breaking camp or retreat of the highwaymen, the posing and

arrangement of Biblical figures outlining some great occasion and expressing human feeling in its wildest sense, or the delicious humor of the "Don" in his valiant attempt to right wrongs and relieve helpless damsels in their distress, there is always movement. We cannot resist the nervous expectancy of his horses. The eye is arrested by the eager look of the brigand waiting for adventure. There is a feeling of life in the very woods and hills themselves. Like Israels, the painter discovers the psychological moment, and so paints the incident that we are carried along with the current of his imagination and feel that we are at least lookers-on, if not actual participants, in the battle.

Composition.

In carefully examining a picture, one of the first questions the average intelligent man considers is the arrangement. If the composition is at fault, color will not remedy nor will good draughtmanship conceal the defects. It is true that there are many poor pictures which are admirably composed, but there are few good pictures in which the composition is faulty. Jurren does not err in his knowledge and application of this important element. Taking, for example, a picture with many figures, it is difficult to say that a single item should have been omitted from the scene. It is equally true that the addition of a single object would materially interfere with the well-balanced sense of the artist's arrangement. At first glance, one might be inclined to think that the picture is too crowded, but when one considers the relation between the various objects and observes how skilfully each one is handled

with regard to all the others, the whole becomes a perfect aggregate in which every individual part fills its proper place. Some of the figures appear in cleverly adjusted light, others in deep rich shadow, but around them all is an environment of wonderful atmosphere binding them together in a harmonious entity.

The wearied horse tells of hard riding as he stands with drooped head and relaxed muscles. The man, expectant, looks eagerly for the object of his venture, and his physical exhaustion is almost hidden by the nervous domination of a strong will and a stronger desire to meet the approaching danger. The camp is not the grouping of listlessly moving individuals, but strikes one as a scene of bustle and excited movement. The scenes taken from Biblical record are full of spiritual significance underlying the outward semblance of the situation. And all these things are made more impressive by the fact that all the actors are present taking their parts, the drama is rounded off and the tragedy is complete in its stage arrangements. Like some fine piece of music composed of many notes and various keys, but blended together, so as to render complete harmony, so the many objects in the more important works of Jurrès arrange themselves in a system of wonderful mechanism, each having its function in the composition of the artist's creation.

Tone.

Much might be said of the element of tonality evidenced by the pictures of this artist if space permitted. Sufficient to say that in most of them, there is a keen appreciation of the value of tone. When we

see a picture made up of complex color and find no jarring note to offend the eye or disturb the sensitive camera of our mental appreciation, it may be safely concluded that tone is not wanting. In color-values, Jurrès undoubtedly shows the highest skill. His picture is not like that of the modern impressionist, a combination of independent colors. It is a unity. By subtle gradations in color, he blends the various and often widely different colors together so that the light reflected is not only true to nature but produces that quality of aerial perspective which is so necessary to the production of a great work of art. The various strong colors he delights in are so adjusted with relation to one another and with regard to the whole, that the eye does not rest upon any particular part but absorbs all as a beautiful unit.

Perhaps there are comparatively few who understand tone in a picture, but every one must appreciate it even though ignorant of what it really means. One false note mars the line of music. One color in defective value-relation to the rest spoils the picture. The various colors must be so adjusted and applied as to make each dependent on the other and to give that degree of light and modification which is necessary to harmonize them all in one general result. If this is not the condition, there will be two or more independent pictures on the canvas, and the picture itself will be devoid of atmospheric perspective and envelopment. The works of Willem Maris, for instance, are bathed in sunlight and in his strongest pictures the palpitating light pervades them throughout. He paints sunlight as few men have done. Israëls in his interiors gets

his wonderful atmosphere by distribution of light. The result is not the less real because it comes from the illusory effect produced by a perfect knowledge of color values. Jurres uses stronger color, but the individual color is not what we observe. We see the deep red, for instance, not as a separate color, but as a red changed and qualified by the color in the rest of the painting. It does not mar our vision. It does not stand forth as an isolated object. The red, however strong, is but an incident in the general combination, adding to the beauty of the surrounding colors, and taking from them that which enhances its own value. In regard to this quality, Jurres is a high-priest.

Of his methods and materials, it is not necessary to speak. His treatment is broad and effective, and his technique is distinguished by great freedom and strong brush work. The actual result is of more importance, but this has already been discussed as fully as possible in an article necessarily limited.

What shall we say as to this painter's future? Is there any reason why he should not give stronger evidence of his title as a "second Rembrandt"? He will, beyond question, add to his reputation by the fruits of experience and the exercise of the talents he possesses. He must not forget that he is working for all time, and that the present moment is only a circumstance in his art. Earnest, thoughtful work will make for him a place in the record of famous men. His admirers of to-day will derive constant pleasure in looking at his pictures. Personal profit will come as a reward for his efforts. But above and beyond all this, he should remember that there is a temple in the centuries unborn in which he should make for himself

a place in that inmost chamber which will contain as a continuing heritage, the best works of the greatest men in the profession of art. I have the strongest belief that Jurras will not be fully appreciated or reach the limit of his fame, until time shall have tested his work and realized the true value of his genius.

TORONTO, CANADA, November, 1910.

